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ABSTRACT

The California community colleges represent one of the few remaining tuition-free postsecondary systems, a position strengthened by recent legislation establishing a no-fee policy for all credit classes and removing the 21-year-old "defined adult" State funding limitation. Today's community college students average 25 years of age, most are married and working, with incomes in the lower and middle economic groups, and two-thirds enroll part-time. That tuition/fee imposition results directly in restricted opportunities for higher education is illustrated in studies by the First National Bank of New York, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the American Council on Education, Stanford Research Institute, and the Educational Testing Service veterans' study. The University of Wisconsin lowered tuition at two of its two-year centers with resultant enrollment increases of 47% and 23%, illustrating the relationship of tuition and enrollment. Arguments for increasing tuition while also increasing student aid ignore evidence that the need is greater than available funds, that only the poor benefit, and that funds are subject to political pressure. Also, aid programs are not designed for today's older, part-time students. For them and a healthy community college system, the only financing solution is the continuation of a tuition-free policy. (RT)

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"THE CALIFORNIA DREAM:
TUITION-FREE HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE CROSSROADS"

By

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TC 770 549

"The California Dream: Tuition-Free Higher Education
at the Crossroads"
by Sidney W. Brossman

The California community colleges appear to be at the crossroads in respect to tuition-free higher education. There's more and more talk in California about tuition-free higher education--whether it's wise and whether we can afford it.

Tuition has gone up at the University of California, where it was instituted some years ago after more than a century of no tuition. And there is fear that the dream may fade elsewhere in California.

The California community colleges now represent one of the few remaining tuition-free systems in the nation, City University of New York being the latest to capitulate.

In California, tuition-free community colleges came about as an extension of the free public elementary and secondary school system. In other words, it came about naturally. When higher fees were instituted at the universities and colleges, the case was made that four-year institutions represent a privilege for citizens seeking higher education, but that lower grades represent a right. Community colleges, then, thrown in with public schools, were exempt from the debate on tuition at that time on the basis that at least two years beyond high school were the absolute minimum required by citizens in an increasingly complex and technological modern society. The argument here is a well-known one--that our free public educational system has resulted in an extremely well-educated population which has made us one of the most productive and most technologically advanced societies in the world.

In addition, many people see tuition-free education as one of the most fundamental safeguards of our democratic way of life. The argument for tuition-free community colleges continues that, through the system, our citizens have risen occupationally and financially, made a greater contribution to our society, and also paid much higher federal, state and local taxes. Research is also available showing that far more individual and social stability exists among the college educated, far lower rates of family instability, poverty, unemployment, and crime, and far less dependence on costly government social services.

There already are a few fees in the California community colleges--for parking and health services, particularly. In addition, most community colleges charge student body fees.

In addition, until very recently, California had what was known as the statutory "defined adult." This term referred to a method of financing community colleges in which the state provided funds for roughly half the cost per "regular" student. But a student 21 years or older and taking fewer than 10 hours a term was known as a "defined adult," for which the state paid roughly only 25% of the cost. The relationship of the "defined adult" to tuition was that, by law, community colleges could charge instructional fees to such students. And although many community colleges did not charge for instruction, or charged only minimally, it nevertheless was tuition.

Now that the "defined adult" category has been eliminated, California has actually moved away from tuition, not closer to it. About 20% of all California community college enrollment had been in the "defined adult" category, and many of these students had been taking credit classes. Now, however, tuition may not be charged in any credit class, regardless of the age of students or the number of classes they are taking.

Instead, fees may be charged only for non-credit classes. Since only about 8% of California community college enrollment is in non-credit classes, this means that such fees have been reduced from a potential of about one fifth of enrollment to about one half of enrollment. Therefore, although there is some talk in California about tuition, the community colleges have actually taken a step away from it.

Tuition is not the way the governors or legislators should balance the state budget. Nor is there, or will there ever be, enough student aid to take care of everyone who wants to go to college. Certainly, in California it's not true that fewer people want to go to college anyway.

Enrollment projections are extremely important here: In 1974 California community college average daily attendance was almost 700,000. In 1976, it

was about 820,000. In 1977, 870,000. In 1978, 920,000. In 1979, 965,000. And in 1980 we expect well over 1 million ADA. (Headcount enrollment is already over 1.3 million and will, of course, go up with the ADA.)

The average age of California community college students is at least 25. And more than two thirds of these students are now part time. Most of these students, therefore, are working while pursuing their education, many are married, and most include, not only the poor and disadvantaged, but also those in the lower and middle-income family groups. All this means that tuition to the student is one of the most significant factors of college enrollment today.

There is no question but that tuition and fees result directly in restricted opportunities for higher education.

Our findings in California are not unlike those uncovered by the First National City Bank of New York, which recently did a study showing that 12.8% of Americans indicated that someone in their family had been prevented from going to college during the past 5 or 6 years because of costs. The same study indicated that 30% of the families experienced extreme hardship in college costs. Another 30% reported moderate hardships.

A Bureau of Labor Statistics study shows that the percentage of high school graduates going on to any college increased sharply from 1962 to 1968 and then declined sharply to 1972. It was low again by 1974. One of the reasons underlying the fluctuation in attendance was rising tuition. Between 1961 and

1974, according to the U.S. Office of Education, tuitions increased much faster than the Consumer Price Index.

In California at least 75% of all high school graduates go on to college of some sort. This high percentage is due directly to the fact that there is no tuition in the community colleges and that tuition is low in the four-year public institutions. The American Council on Education, using calculations based on U.S. Office of Education data, makes it abundantly clear that the percentage of high school graduates going directly on to any college is generally low in states with high tuition and a lack of opportunities to attend geographically-convenient open-access institutions. ACE contrasts California's 75% with only about 35% of high school graduates in Maine and Vermont going to college. And Maine and Vermont have very high tuitions. Therefore, it would seem that a principal reason for these differences is tuition and the geographic availability of low-tuition colleges and community colleges.

The same is true in respect to the percentage of Vietnam veterans going to college, depending upon the tuition policies in their respective states. In the fall of 1975, well after the Vietnam war, we still had about 217,000 veterans with benefits in attendance in the California community colleges. Again, data from the Education Testing Service of Princeton regarding Vietnam veterans attending college in the various states are especially revealing. Generally, veterans' attendance rates follow the same pattern as those for high school graduates. In states with low tuition and geographic accessibility to college, such as California and Arizona, very high percentages of Vietnam veterans have gone to college. In high tuition states, such as Vermont, and those without easy geographic access to low-tuition colleges, relatively small percentages of veterans have attended. ETS has come to the

conclusion that access to low tuition colleges is the principal reason why many more veterans go on to college in some states than in others.

Recently the University of Wisconsin conducted one of the few experiments ever made in this country actually to study the effect of tuition changes on enrollment. The state lowered tuition sharply at two of the two-year centers of the Wisconsin system from $429 a year to $80 a year, while holding tuition constant at all other two-year centers, colleges and universities. The result was a remarkable enrollment increase of 47% at one center and 23% at the other. For every one percentage reduction in the total cost of attending a low-fee center, there was a 1.3 percentage increase in enrollment.

This is consistent with a Stanford Research Institute report by Dr. Daryl E. Carlson that for every $100 decrease in tuition, institutional enrollments would increase more than 1% among students from families earning more than $12,000 annually, and more than 7% among students from families earning less than $6,000. Other studies have shown the same thing--that reduced tuition will increase college enrollment and that increased tuition has the opposite effect. A major study in this regard comes from "Financing Postsecondary Education in the United States" from the National Commission on the Financing of Postsecondary Education.

Another fact which helps to explain falling college enrollments in relationship to rising college tuition and other fees comes from David Goldberg and Albert Anderson of the University of Michigan, showing that there is a great deal of "sibling overlap" because so many young families in the 1950's had three or more children spaced two or three years apart. As a result, a great many families now face the problem of educating three children over an

8 or 9-year period. According to the authors, this "overlap" phenomenon will continue to be a severe problem until the early 1980's.

In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor has reported that the median American family income is less than $13,000 a year. It's clear that most such families will have great difficulty in affording college. The Bureau estimated that a four-person family with an income of slightly over $9,000 would have about $415 a year in miscellaneous funds left over for education and other expenditures such as recreation. A four-person family with an income of $14,333 would have about $662 a year left over for education, recreation and other purposes.

Another point often made in connection with discussions of tuition is that student financial problems should be resolved, not by keeping tuition down, but by raising federal and state student aid. Reference here should be made to a Stanford Research Institute study, "Student Aid: Description and Options, 1975." This is one of many studies indicating that present student aid funds are far below the level of need and that the level of such funds is also very much affected by the state of residence and the type of college attended. Unfortunately, every study of student aid finds that the need for student aid is far greater than the likelihood that hard-pressed federal or state governments will find the necessary funds. Our problem is that many lower and middle-income families receive very little aid, sometimes none. Most aid programs properly are concentrated on the poor. But most working-class and middle-income families will be hit with higher charges. In addition, student aid is subject to annual political and academic pressures, and the funds and procedures tend to change every year. Every year there's been an

actual or potential shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars in unmet needs for federal student financial aid.

All of us must understand and make sure that our political leaders, governors, legislators, and members of governing boards realize that student aid alone is not, and cannot be, a substitute for low tuition. It's only a valuable supplement. Some have suggested that, by raising tuition, more funds can be generated or made available for student aid for the poor. Unfortunately, there's very little reason to believe that states would reappropriate increased tuition revenues in the form of student aid or that adequate student aid could be generated in this way for moderate-income students.

In addition, some people are emphasizing very expensive long-term loans as a principal way to finance student aid. And some of these same people are the very ones who are trying hard to raise tuition. On the other hand, many oppose young people taking on debts of thousands of dollars as a price for a college education, which is an additional reason for not relying too much on student aid, especially loans.

In addition, as pointed out earlier, about two thirds of our students are now part time, and the average age is about 25. But student aid programs, inadequate to meet the needs of younger students, are not designed to serve older students, including working men and women who wish to continue their education or learn new skills. Many state student-aid programs exclude part-time students. And in many states colleges have chosen to exclude part-time students from some federal student-aid programs because of a shortage of funds.

Therefore, it seems fairly obvious that if you want to reach older students, working men and women, housewives, and others who wish to return to school, a policy of no tuition is the only way to do it.

Even though the California community colleges have become just about the last outpost of tuition-free higher education in the nation, the hope is high that California will retain its traditional role of leadership and not follow the rest of the states, but, instead, provide an example for the rest of the nation to follow.

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